

Dear Chairman Martin:

I have NEVER ascribed to the theory that "bigger is better". It's an illusion in America that we have a lot of choices. Everytime I read a food label, I am disgusted at how few mega corporations control the food supply in the world, let alone our own country. It's the same with communications and information. It's a very dangerous thing to have media concentrated in too few hands. I want you to do your job in helping to preserve what's left of our "democratic" republic and not allow these mega mergers. I mean, really, just how much is enough power and money and control for these people? I am writing to challenge the Comcast/Time Warner/Adelphia merger (FCC Docket No. 05-192) and the AT&T/BellSouth merger (FCC Docket No. 06-74). Allowing the largest telecommunications company and the two largest cable companies in the United States to grow even larger does not serve the public interest.

The concentration of media power is a growing problem in this country. Though we have more channels available than ever before, they are increasingly falling under the control of a handful of giant corporations. The cost of broadband service also remains out of reach for many households. Americans are hungry for more competition in services. However, these mergers will only starve Americans of this needed competition.

Allowing AT&T to combine with BellSouth will give the top three broadband providers control of over half of all broadband connections in the country. At the same time, the Time Warner/Comcast/Adelphia merger will give Comcast and Time Warner increased power over entire regions of the United States, allowing rates to rise even as the digital divide continues to grow.

The FCC should block these transactions or impose strict conditions to protect free speech and competition under its "public interest standard." If the FCC decides to allow either of these mergers, it should require the following conditions:

1. Subscribers must be able to choose from competitive Internet Service Providers ("open access"). The FCC should also ensure that these companies cannot discriminate against any Internet content or rival service and that every service will be treated exactly the same ("Network Neutrality"). This is supposed to be a "free market" society driven by supply and demand, but it is anything but that. Competition and innovation have been crushed under these giants, and mediocrity reigns.

2. Companies must be required to sell broadband access separate from video and telephone service, and at the same price ("naked broadband" or "unbundling"). I am really disturbed that my husband "bundled" our Internet Access together with our phones. I think that's a very dangerous thing. I have refused to allow him to "bundle" television in there with the rest of it because I realize the danger to all of us when information is in the hands of too few.

3. Any subscriber must be able to connect any device to the network (such as a Wi-Fi router) that does not harm the network.

4. Take steps to protect public access programming ("PEG"). Cable companies have become less responsive to the needs and requirements of communities. The quality of public accountability in local franchise agreements has declined, as big companies leverage their power to squeeze local governments. Likewise, telecommunications giants — like AT&T — are trying to eliminate the remaining vestiges of effective local oversight and control altogether. There isn't much Public Service in television or radio anymore, and that's a crime. The air waves belong to everyone, and when these giants control all of them without having to be socially responsible, it's nothing but a greedy rip off. When I think of what good for society a medium such as television could have been, and see what it's become, I get sick at heart.

5. Independent programmers must be able to reach subscribers. We are required to buy channels we don't want or need because providers of video service bundle them together. I hate having to pay for garbage I never use. I'd like to be able to pick and choose what I pay for. The way they bundle channels DOES NOT encourage me to buy additional packages, it just makes me watch a lot less television, and that's probably a great thing considering the trash that most of it is!

6. Any company that owns both programming and video systems should be required to provide competitors with access to their regional sports and other programming needed to offer competing services, so consumers will still have real choices. In the realm of sports, I REALLY hate it that one network or another has total "ownership" of entire tournaments. That's just their way of charging us even more for what we used to get for FREE!

In conclusion, I ask the FCC to consider the interests of the people like me who pay the cable, telephone and broadband bills and watch the programming. Many of us already have enough trouble trying to afford broadband or cable TV. Please don't make it even harder for us to find competitors, or make it easier for Comcast, Time Warner and AT&T to raise prices or block local and independent voices.